United Nations

Report of the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations

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Official Records • Fifty-first Session
Supplement No. 43 (A/51/43)

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REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF THE WORK OF THE HIGH-LEVEL OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE FINANCIAL SITUATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

1. At the 28th plenary meeting of the General Assembly, on 12 October 1994, the Secretary-General made a statement entitled "Ensuring a viable financial basis for the Organization".[1] At its 85th and 86th meetings, on 12 December 1994, the Assembly held a general debate on the financial situation of the United Nations, under agenda item 10, entitled "Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization".[2]

2. At the 94th plenary meeting, on 23 December 1994, the President of the General Assembly, after intensive consultations, submitted to the Assembly a draft resolution entitled "Financial situation of the United Nations" (A/49/L.63), which was adopted, without a vote, as resolution 49/143 of 23 December 1994. The adoption of the resolution was accompanied by a statement made by the President of the General Assembly, on the basis of intensive consultations in which he referred to the mandate of the Working Group.[3]

3. The High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations held 39 meetings from 20 January to 28 July 1995. In pursuance of paragraph 3 of resolution 49/143, the Working Group submitted a report through the Fifth Committee to the General Assembly, entitled "Report of the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations".[4] In adopting the draft decision contained in paragraph 33 of the report of the Working Group, the General Assembly, in its decision 49/496 of 14 September 1995, decided that the Working Group should continue its work during the fiftieth session of the Assembly.

4. The Working Group held 30 meetings from 28 November 1995 to 4 June 1996 during the fiftieth session of the General Assembly. At its 30th meeting, on 4 June 1996, the Working Group concluded its discussions for the fiftieth session and, in accordance with Assembly decision 49/496, submitted, through the Fifth Committee, the report on the progress of its work.[4] The Working Group decided to recommend that, based on its programme of work,[5] the discussion on the issues covered by its mandate should continue during the fifty-first session of the Assembly and should build on the work done in the course of the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions, in order to enable the Assembly to take the appropriate measures to provide the Organization with a viable financial base for its future operations.

5. To that end, the Working Group recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

> "The General Assembly, having considered the report on the progress of the work of the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/143 of 23 December 1994 and decision 49/496 of 14 September 1995:
>
> "(a) Takes note of the work of the High-level Open-ended Working Group;

"(b) Decides that the Working Group should continue its work, taking into account, inter alia, its considerations during the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions and the views expressed at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, and submit to it, through the Fifth Committee, a report on its work, including any possible recommendations to the Assembly at its fifty-first session."

6. At its 67th meeting, on 12 September 1996, the Fifth Committee considered the report of the Working Group. The comments and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the report are reflected in the relevant summary record (A/C.5/50/SR.67). At the same meeting, on the proposal of the Chairman, the Committee, without objection, took note of the report of the Working Group and decided to transmit it to the General Assembly at its resumed fiftieth session for action.

7. At its 126th plenary meeting, on 16 September 1996, the General Assembly took note in its decision 50/487 of the report of the Fifth Committee transmitting the report of the Working Group (A/50/1038). At the same meeting, the Assembly adopted as decision 50/488 the draft decision contained in paragraph 21 of the report of the Working Group. Decision 50/488 reads as follows:

"At its 126th plenary meeting, on 16 September 1996, the General Assembly, having considered the report on the progress of the work of the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations, established pursuant to Assembly resolution 49/143 of 23 December 1994 and decision 49/496 of 14 September 1995, noted the work of the Working Group, and decided that the latter should continue its work, taking into account, inter alia, its considerations during the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions and the views expressed at the fifty-first session of the Assembly, and submit to the Assembly at its fifty-first session, through the Fifth Committee, a report on its work, including any possible recommendations."

8. The present report is submitted in pursuance of the decision contained in paragraph 7 above.

9. The High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations held 10 meetings from 23 October 1996 to 16 June 1997. At its 1st meeting, on 23 October 1996, which was chaired by the Chairman, Mr. Razali Ismail, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session, the Working Group re-elected Mr. Ernst Sucharipa (Austria) and Mrs. Annette des Iles (Trinidad and Tobago) as Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group.

10. At its 2nd meeting, on 3 March 1997, the Working Group considered a working paper entitled "Proposed programme of work for 1997" submitted by the Vice-Chairmen,[6] which contained a proposed programme of work and a tentative schedule of meetings, listing questions and issues for discussion during the fifty-first session that fall within the mandate of the Working Group.

11. It was agreed that during the fifty-first session, the Working Group would continue to deal with the following questions:

(a) The payment by Member States of their contributions in full and on time;

(b) The problem of arrears in the payment of contributions by Member States;

(c) The procedure for the approval of peacekeeping budgets and appropriations;

(d) The cash-flow situation of the Organization;

(e) Methods for calculating the scale of assessments;

(f) Any other elements.

12. It was also agreed that, in the light of General Assembly decision 51/454 of 18 December 1996 on the scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations, the Working Group should commence its work with the consideration of the following issues:

(a) The cash-flow situation of the Organization: presentation by the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management;

(b) The payment by Member States of their contributions in full and on time;

(c) The problem of arrears in the payment of contributions by Member States: an undertaking on the part of all countries, including those most indebted to the Organization, to settle their arrears within a fixed time-frame.

13. At the 3rd meeting of the Working Group, on 4 March 1997, the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management made a statement and informed the members of the financial situation of the United Nations and answered questions put to him by the members.

14. At the 4th meeting, on 6 March, the Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group submitted a working paper entitled "Payment of contributions in full and on time and reduction of arrears: a framework for discussion".[7] At its 4th and 5th meetings, on 6 and 7 March, the Working Group held discussions on the issues raised in the working paper.

15. At the 6th meeting, on 14 April, a working paper was proposed by the Vice-Chairmen.[8] The working paper contained a draft decision pertaining to the following issues:

(a) The payment by Member States of their contributions in full and on time;

(b) The problem of arrears in the payment of contributions by Member States;

(c) The cash-flow situation of the Organization.

16. The working paper also listed questions for further discussion, as follows:

(a) Methods for calculating the scales of assessments;

(b) The procedure for the approval of peacekeeping budgets and appropriations;

(c) Any other elements.

17. At its 6th to 9th meetings, on 14, 16, 17 and 21 April 1997, the Working Group held discussions on the issues contained in the working paper. During the discussions, individual members, as well as groups of Member States, while welcoming the efforts of the Vice-Chairmen, nevertheless expressed differing views on all the issues contained in the working paper.

18. At its 10th meeting, on 16 June 1997, the Working Group concluded its discussions for the present session of the General Assembly and, in accordance with Assembly decision 50/488, is submitting, through the Fifth Committee, the present report on the progress of its work to the Assembly at its fifty-first session. Based on its work during the forty-ninth, fiftieth and fifty-first sessions, the Working Group recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

> "The General Assembly, having considered the report on the progress of the work of the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/143 of 23 December 1994 and decisions 49/496 of 14 September 1995 and 50/488 of 16 September 1996, notes the work of the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the understanding that the work of the Group would be resumed when appropriate after consultations with Member States."

Notes

[1] See Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Plenary Meetings, 28th meeting, and corrigendum.

[2] Ibid., 85th and 86th meetings.

[3] Ibid., 94th meeting.

[4] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 43 (A/50/43).

[5] Ibid., para. 10.

[6] WGFS/97/1.

[7] WGFS/97/3.

[8] WGFS/97/4.

ANNEX

List of working papers*

WGFS/97/1	Proposed programme of work for 1997, submitted by the Vice-Chairmen
WGFS/97/2	Statement made on 3 March 1997 by Mr. Joseph E. Connor, Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, to the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations
WGFS/97/3	Payment of contributions in full and on time and reduction of arrears: a framework for discussions submitted by the Vice-Chairmen
WGFS/97/4	Payment by Member States of their contributions in full and on time; problem of arrears in the payment of contributions by Member States; and the cash-flow situation of the Organization: draft decision proposed by the Vice-Chairmen

* The working papers have been placed in the files of the Secretariat and are available to Member States for consultation. The list of all working papers submitted to the Working Group at its forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions (WGFS/1-56), including proposals by Member States, is contained in the annex to the report on the progress of the work of the Working Group submitted to the Assembly at its fiftieth session (A/50/43).